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United States Department of Agriculture

Forest Service

FS-549

Forest Service American Indian/ Alaska Native Policy—Friends and Partners

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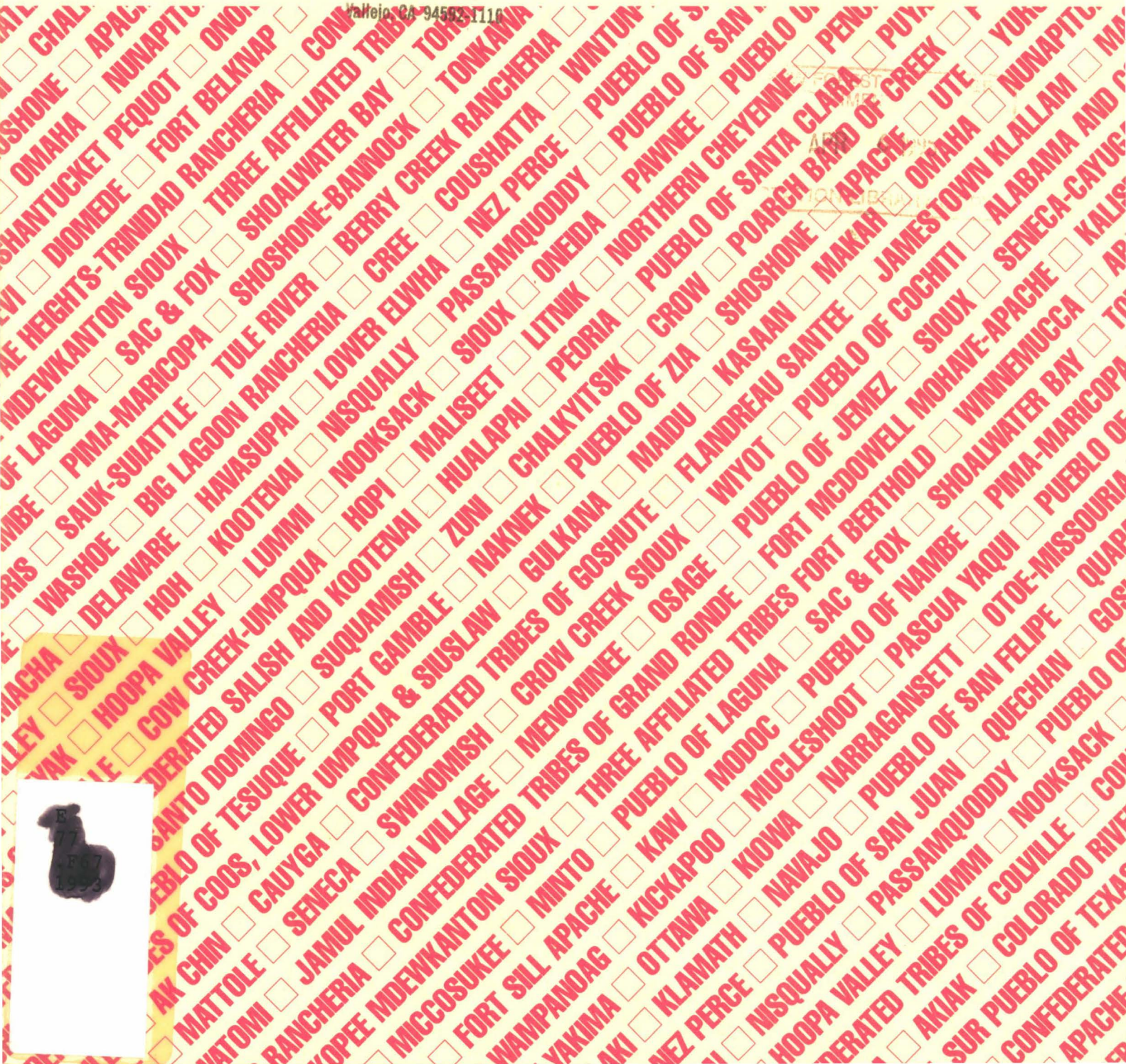


Message from the Chief:

It is exciting to share with you the Forest Service Policy toward American Indians and Alaska Natives.

As Indian Governments are assuming more and more of their destiny, it is fitting that the Forest Service respect them and work with them in a Government-to-Government relationship.

We've generally had long standing, neighborly friendships. As we each move to tomorrow and our futures, we should be able to maintain that friendship as well as create new, dynamic partnerships in matters of our mutual interest. That is especially exciting!

The opportunities are at hand. . .it is time to visit, meet, and walk the land together. The rewards of these actions should benefit us all.

F. Dale Robertson

F. Dale Robertson

RMO

Policy Background

American Indians and Alaska Natives are people with distinct cultures and traditional values. Most live west of the Mississippi, but there are American Indians/Alaska Natives living in every State of the Union. Approximately 28 percent live on reservations, which range in size from the 15.4-million-acre Navajo Nation in the Southwest to the 1/4-acre Golden Hill Reservation in Connecticut. Many of these reservations are adjacent to National Forest lands. At present, there are 53 million acres of Indian lands in the United States. After the Alaska Native land selections are completed, almost 5 percent of all land in the United States will be in Native American ownership.

Tribal Governments

American Indians and Alaska Natives have a special and unique legal and political relationship with the Government of the United States, defined by history, treaties, statutes, court decisions, and the U.S. Constitution. Tribal governments have considerable powers that are frequently separate and equal to those of State and local governments, particularly regarding civil and criminal jurisdiction over individuals and corporations.

Trust Responsibilities

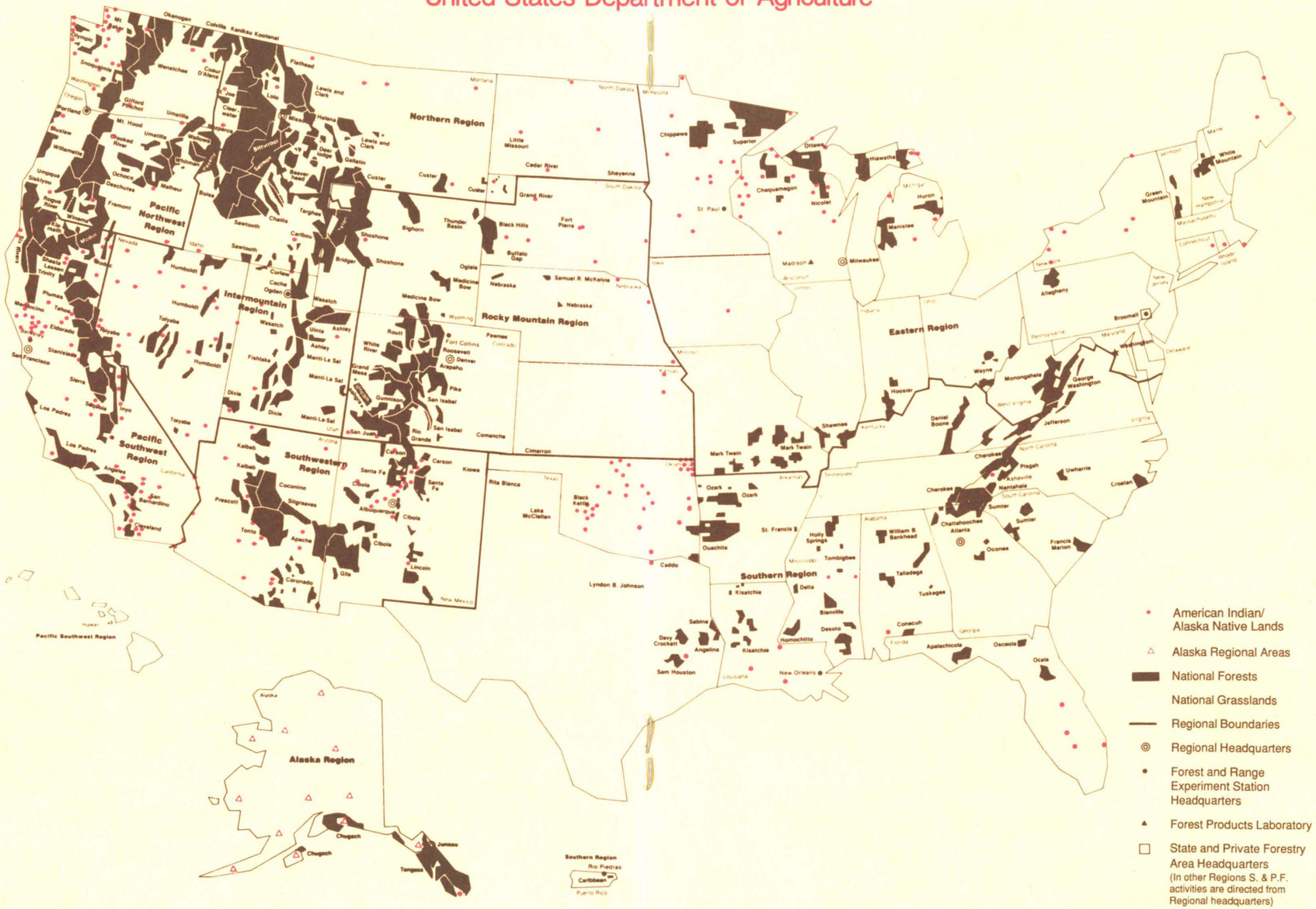
The policy of the U.S. Government is to support Native American cultural and political integrity. The United States has entered into more than 600 treaties and agreements with American Indians. These treaties and agreements create a legal responsibility by the United States toward American Indians. The U.S. Government is obligated under these treaties and agreements to protect and maintain Indian lands, self government, resources, and traditional use areas. The Congress also imposes trust responsibilities on Government agencies through statutory enactments. The Bureau of Indian Affairs, Department of the Interior, has the principal responsibility for carrying out the statutorily mandated trust responsibilities on tribal lands, but all Federal agencies have trust obligations when carrying out laws enacted for the protection or benefit of Indians.

Unique Uses

There are many rights and privileges associated with treaties, such as grazing, hunting, subsistence, and gathering of plant resources. In addition, land and resources hold a special and unique meaning in the spiritual and everyday lifeways of many American Indians. National Forest System lands contain many traditional historic, and contemporary use-areas of critical importance to American Indians/Alaska Natives. Cultural practices, such as gathering of plant resources, occur commonly on National Forest lands.

The Forest Service

United States Department of Agriculture



AMERICAN INDIAN/ ALASKA NATIVE LANDS

National Forests, Research Stations, and State & Private areas.

The Policy

The President issued a Federal Indian Policy in January 1983. This policy was reaffirmed by President George Bush in September 1989. The U.S. Department of Agriculture issued Indian Policy DR1026-6 on October 16, 1992. This policy, coupled with an Agreement in Principle of January 1988 between the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Department of the Interior, supports the Forest Service actions in establishing mutual and beneficial partnerships with our American Indian and Alaska Native neighbors. Forest Service policy, as recorded in Forest Service Manual 1563, is to:

1. **Maintain a governmental relationship with federally recognized tribal governments.**

   Take the time to meet with tribal governments on a regular basis. Build and enhance a mutual partnership. Gain an understanding of each other to develop an effective governmental relationship. Pursue initiatives and efforts similar to those conducted with State governments.

2. **Implement our programs and activities honoring Indian treaty rights and fulfill legally mandated trust responsibilities to the extent that they are determined applicable to National Forest System lands.**

   Visit our tribal neighbors. Learn about their treaties and rights. Talk with them about areas of mutual interest. Reconcile Indian needs and claims with the principles of good management, multiple use, and National Forest laws and policies. Attempt reasonable accommodation without compromising the legal positions of either the Indians or the Federal Government. Work together to develop ways to accomplish the goals of this policy.

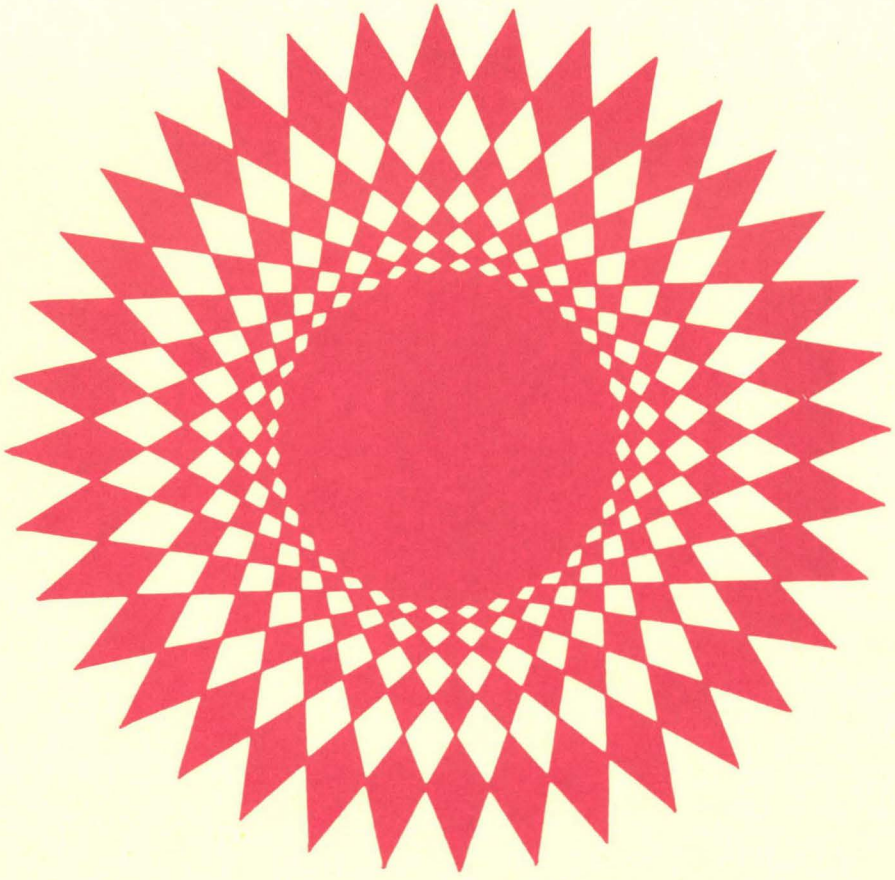
3. **Administer programs and activities to address and be sensitive to traditional native religious beliefs and practices.**

   Walk the land with Native Americans to gain an understanding and appreciation of their culture, religion, beliefs, and practices. We must identify and acknowledge these cultural needs in our activities. We consider these values an important part of management of the National Forests.

4. **Provide research, transfer of technology, and technical assistance to Indian governments.**

   Together, develop research and environmental programs to meet Native Americans' objectives. Extend State and Private programs to tribal governments. Exchange and share technical staffs and skills.

February 1990
Slightly revised July 1993



. . .This we know: The earth does not belong to man, man belongs to the earth. All things are connected like the blood that unites us all: man did not weave the web of life, he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web he does to himself. . .

(An interpretation) Chief Seattle, 1852.

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